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## Entrepreneurs find ways to make money from manure

BY ARNOLD M. KNIGHTLY  
BUSINESS PRESS

Two Southern Nevada businesses -- a Nye County dairy and a Las Vegas aquafarmer -- are working with the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension in turning their animal waste products into money-making ventures.

The Ponderosa Dairies in the Armagosa Valley, 85 miles northwest of Las Vegas, has reconstituted the manure produced by its more than 8,500 cows into a compost sold at area Star Nurseries.

"It is extremely high quality," said Bob Morris, a professor at the University of Nevada Cooperative Extension. "Probably one of the highest quality composted products I've ever run across."

Located outside of Death Valley, the dairy currently produces nearly 30 percent of the state's milk off of 17,000 cows. However, it received heavy fines by the U.S. Government for waste disposal mismanagement.

### ILLEGAL DUMPING

In the most publicized case, in February 1998, a dairy manager and an employee illegally dumped 1.7 million gallons of waste water made up of urine and feces onto the valley floor. The waste eventually made its way into Armagosa River. In a case prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice in U.S. District Court in Fresno, Calif., the dairy was fined \$250,000 and assessed \$17,000 in other costs. The manager was also fined \$5,000 and put on three years' probation.

Two years ago, entrepreneur Doug Watts approached the dairy about a partnership in turning the liability into an asset. The compost was tested and analyzed by Morris at the orchard at the University of Nevada Research and Demonstration Facility on Decatur Boulevard, four miles



Star Nurseries in Las Vegas will sell the manure produced by cows at Ponderosa Dairies under the brand name Nevada Organic Compost.

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north of Craig Road. Morris also enlisted the assistance of more than 30 home gardeners in the Las Vegas area and Dr. Elaine Ingham of the Corvallis, Ore.-based Soil Foodweb. Morris says he got back nothing but "glowing" reports.

In 2005, the first year of production, Watts' company, Soil Plus, sold 10,000 tons of compost grossing \$165,000. Sold under the brand name Nevada Organic Compost, Watts projects that Soil Plus will sell 20,000 tons this year for a gross of approximately \$500,000.

"It's worked out good for both of us," said Watts of the partnership with Ponderosa Dairies. "I hope it continues to work out this way. They didn't have other people coming out talking to them before I came out. Since its development, it has all kinds of people who want to get involved."

## **EQUESTRIAN CENTER**

Watts lists the Clark County School District, the City of Henderson and landscape contractors among his primary customers. He may soon be receiving waste from the new equestrian center at the South Coast Hotel & Casino.

Studying the model of the dairy waste project, Paul Eden, president of Seafood Biz Nevada, contacted Morris more than a year ago from Australia looking for a possibly profitable outlet for his company's fish waste.

As reported in the May 8 edition of the Business Press, Eden is in the process of establishing a barramundi farm here that he hopes will supply area restaurants and food markets with the delectable fish.

One of the concerns that arose during the project's research and development in Australia is what do with all the natural fish waste. Eden sent Morris some it and Morris used the orchard and nearly 40 home growers to test the product.

Unlike the dairy's compost material that is applied to the ground and watered in, the fish waste is used as a liquid-applied foliage fertilizer complementary to the compost dairy manure. Sprayed on leaves, it is quickly absorbed by the plants.

The barramundi waste product is already being used in Australia's vineyards. Eden plans to take the information gathered from Morris' study and sell the waste to a third party to be manufactured into fertilizer. "The fish waste could end up being worth more than the fish," Eden said.

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